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## THE GAME OF CORRECT ENGLISH

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About two years ago a remark that was playfully made during our recess period led to an experiment which, for convenience, we call the "Game of Correct English." It grew out of the fact that the members of our eighth-grade class appeared to have two distinctly different English vocabularies—one used in the classroom and another indulged in at other times. During the first semester that we played our game it was not very well organized. We used the expression the "Game of Correct English" when we were asking for the restatement of something which had involved an error of speech or writing.

It was during a lesson in composition at the blackboard that the delicacy of our experiment came to me with full force. A pupil had written, "Bessie, where was you?" In mock astonishment I asked of her, "Where *was* you?" "Well," she replied, "that is a direct quotation. I am telling you what my mother said to me, and that is the way she always talks."

I acknowledged that I felt some hesitancy about just how to reply. A boy raised his hand, and I was glad to have an excuse for delaying my answer. So I said, "Well, Chester, have you a suggestion to make?" "No, not about that; it just made me think of the way I tripped up *my* mother the other day. She told me to go *in* the house. I told her that was an impossibility, but that I should willingly go *into* the house."

At that moment I knew that the "Game of Correct English" must be put upon a safer foundation than haphazard playfulness. It came to me to say, "Why not ask our mothers and all the home folks to get into our game?"

It can easily be understood why I was especially anxious not to arouse any antagonism in the neighborhood. Hence my gratifica-

tion when the suggestion was taken in a kindly spirit. From that time on the pupils reported to me many amusing circumstances that arose over the corrections made among different members of the household.

While a considerable amount of informality seemed highly desirable in conducting the experiment, it came to me that if I expected to prove anything worth while for my scheme I must have some tangible outline for report. So after a number of weeks had gone by and we had made frequent corrections of our common errors, I asked the class to report to me each week on these points:

1. How many errors did you correct in your own speech?
2. How many times, when you found yourself about to make a mistake, did you succeed in making a mental correction before the oral error was committed?
3. How many times did you hear errors committed and know that until recently you would have made the same mistake?
4. Do you notice any improvement in the speech of our class members in your conversation with them?
5. When on the street or playground together, do you politely restate in correct form any breach of accepted English you hear on the part of one of our pupils?
6. Are you careful never to abuse this tendency to help each other by offering corrections to adults not playing our game?

The scheme for written report on progress took the form of a six-column tabular arrangement corresponding to the six questions on which we reported. So far there has been no formal record submitted as a portion of regular class work, nor am I sure that it would be wise ever to require such formality.

In reckoning points for credit we allowed none for the last three items included in our report. They took the form of a tendency toward practical social service. It will readily be seen, however, that we desired to keep a definite record of each week's report on the first three points. And just here came the need for tactfulness. Some pupils, if they were truthful, had to report a great many errors. This fact was so apparent that after a few weeks the fun had passed, and a report of forty or fifty errors could be made without exciting the class, even if the preceding report had been but three or four.

At times, it is true, interest in the game seemed to be on the wane. A pupil occasionally said that he had forgotten to count. Then it simply added an extra duty to my days. Quite incidentally and without any formality I would ask the delinquent about the progress of his report as he passed near me in going to or from English classes. Usually on the next report day he had a reasonable statement to make to the class.

It seems superfluous to state that we laid most emphasis upon the second point (catching our own mistakes before they were spoken), for therein lay the hope of genuine progress. Often we took time to talk over just which mistakes we were correcting and found a great deal of similarity in the corrections.

The third point (recognition of freedom from recent errors) seemed worthy of much attention, because if pupils can feel that they are making progress surely they will be more anxious to continue to put forth efforts.

In an attempt to live up more literally to the idea of a game we totaled weekly for each class the credits earned by every member under these second and third items of our tabular report. It did not seem wise to emphasize class comparisons, because our program was very well filled, and, owing to the varying membership in the classes, the element of percentage could not have been omitted. Our comparisons were rather of one week's record with the record of the preceding week for each separate class.

That seemed to leave the first point (correction of errors) as a confessional rather than as a credit earner; but it seemed the happier way to deal with it, for, as the purpose of the "Game of Correct English" is to emphasize freedom from errors, the pupils could scarcely be encouraged to vie with each other for large totals on this item. Naturally my efforts were spent in encouraging the reduction of the number of errors committed and in transferring our attention to the catching of errors before they were actually spoken.

During the past year my work has been such that it has been possible to test out our "Game of Correct English" with classes ranging from 6-A up through the eighth grade. I confess that the spirit of friendly rivalry was greatest among the younger children.

While to a degree that was disappointing to me, yet it gave birth to a brighter hope.

What would be the result if all grade pupils went into the game? Surely such a movement would do much toward correcting the poverty of English so prevalent among pubescents!

The class with which I began the experiment was much given to asking why. It was no great surprise to me, therefore, when they expressed a desire to know why incorrect English was so offensive to me. At first my replies did not seem to satisfy them fully. Finally one day during a lesson on melody-writing it came to me just how to convince them.

After about fifteen original melodies had been examined we found that, while each one had some strong points, not one was quite satisfactory. For a period of nearly three weeks we gave about fifteen minutes daily to the remodeling of the first drafts submitted. At the end of that time I played for the class some of the original efforts contrasted with the improved forms. When they smiled broadly, I insisted upon their telling me why. One boy finally found words to say, "Just because we know better now, we see how strange the first ones were." Then they were able to comprehend why I was anxious for them to grow to the plane where incorrect English would be intolerable to them.

One type of error very common in our classes is the use of "this here" paper and "that there" something else. After several hundred corrections of this brand of mistake I ceased any serious recognition of it and resorted to the use of the question, "Which where one?" It has served us better as a corrective than all the serious restatements we made of this kind of error.

Herbert Spencer asserted that the earliest-learned and oftenest-used words tend to call up images with less loss of time and energy than their later learned synonyms. He was pleading for a highly justifiable economy of time. With how much more justification may we plead for the economy of time that would be effected if the children of this nation could be blessed with appreciation for nicety of expression without stiltedness!